

Message Text

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E.O. 11652: N/A
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SUBJ: POST ELECTION POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

REF: SAN JOSE 0844

1. SUMMARY: POLITICAL ACTIVITY HAS NOT FLAGGED IN COSTA RICA FOLLOWING THE FEB 5 ELECTION. THREE CABINET MEMBERS REPORTEDLY HAVE BEEN CHOSEN; SPECULATION ABOUNDS ON OTHER MAJOR APPOINTMENTS. MANEUVERING WITHIN THE WINNING UNIDAD COALITION HAS BEGUN. THE GOVERNMENT PARTY IS AGONIZING OVER ITS DEFEAT. PLS LEADERS ARE PLACING THE BLAME ON THE IMAGE OF THE CANDIDATE, ON FIGURES-ODUBER DIFFERENCES, ON CAMPAIGN LEADERSHIP, ON DEFICIENT ELECTION PROPAGANDA, AND ON HOW THEY HANDLED THE "CONTINUISMO" ISSUE. THE ODUBER GOVERNMENT, IN A MAJOR POLEMIC WITH OPPOSITION MEDIA, HAS LAUNCHED A BARRAGE OF PUBLIC STATEMENTS TO DEFEND ITS PERFORMANCE AND IMAGE. ADDITIONALLY, PRESIDENT ODUBER HAS ANNOUNED THAT A PROJECT HE HAS LONG ESPOUSED--THE CALLING OF A CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION--IS NOT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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FEASIBLE IN THE CURRENT POST ELECTION CLIMATE, AND THAT HE WILL NOT SEND IT TO THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR A FINAL VOTE DURING THE LAST TEN WEEKS OF THE EXTRAORDINARY LEGISLATIVE SESSION. A NEW CONSTITUTION PRESUMABLY WOULD HAVE INCLUDED A PROVISION TO PERMIT RE-ELECTION OF EX-PRESIDENTS. A SMOOTH TRANSITION OF POWER HAS ALREADY BEGUN. END SUMMARY.

2. CARAZO CABINET CHOICES. ACCORDING TO INFORMED SOURCES, THREE CABINET CHOICES ARE FIRM. TRUSTED CARAZO AIDE JUAN JOSE ECHEVERRIA BREALY (AGE 37) WILL HEAD UP THE NEW MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR, WHICH WILL JOIN TOGETHER THE MINISTRIES OF PUBLIC SECURITY, GOVERNMENT AND THE SECURITY FUNCTIONS NOW IN THE MINISTRY OF THE PRESIDENCY. RAFAEL ANGEL CALDERON FOURNIER, 29 YEAR OLD SON OF EX-PRESIDENT CALDERON GUARDIA, AND LEADER OF THE CALDERONISTA OPPOSITION IN THE CARAZO UNITY COALITION, WILL BE THE NEW FOREIGN MINISTER. ELIZABETH ODIO, 38 YEAR OLD LAWYER, WOMEN'S AFFAIRS AND EX-PLN YOUTH LEADER, IS SLATED TO BE NEW MINISTER OF LABOR. BOTH ECHEVERRIA AND CALDERON ARE CURRENTLY OPPOSITION LEGISLATORS.

3. THE GOVERNMENT-OPPOSITION PRESS POLEMIC. THE ODUBER GOVERNMENT HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN A RUNNING PUBLIC POLEMIC WITH OPPOSITION NEWSPAPERS LA NACION AND LA REPUBLICA DURING THE POST ELECTION PERIOD. THE ODUBER CABINET HAS ISSUED SIX PARTICULARLY BITTER DECLARATIONS SINCE THE FEB 5 ELECTION IN RESPONSE TO THAT MANY HARD HITTING LA NACION EDITORIALS; THE DIFFERENCES ARE OVER "THE CORRUPTION QUESTION, THE RECOVERY OF NATIONAL DIGNITY, AND A RETURN TO DECENCY IN GOVERNMENT" AS PRIME FACTORS IN THE CARAZO ELECTION VICTORY. THE CABINET DECLARATIONS HAVE DEMANDED PROOF OF "CORRUPTION" AND HAVE LASHED OUT AT LA NACION IN PARTICULAR AS BEING THE MOUTHPIECE OF THE NEW GOVERNMENT OF THE OLIGARCHY. IN RESPONSE, LA NACION AND LA REPUBLICA HAVE RESURRECTED A VARIETY OF PAST SCANDALS IN THE ODUBER AND FIGUERES GOVERNMENTS, INCLUDING THE VESCO ISSUE, AND HAVE RECALLED JOSE FIGURES' WIDELY REPORTED CHARGES OF CORRUPTION LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS. THE TRADING OF INSULTS CONTINUES. ROBERT VESCO'S DECLARATIONS TO JACK ANDERSON AND THE MEXICAN MAGAZINE PROCESO (REFTEL) HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE POLEMIC--AND HAVE REFOCUSSED VESCO'S PRESENCE AS A FIRST ORDER OF BUSINESS FOR THE NEW GOVERNMENT. JOSE FIGURES' REHASHES OF HIS VIEWS ON CORRUPTION IN COSTA RICA FOR MEXICAN AND VENEZUELAN MEDIA HAVE DELIGHTED THE CARAZO PEOPLE.

4. CAMPAIGN FINANCING INVESTIGATION. FOLLOWING DISCLOSURE BY MEXICAN MEDIA THAT THE PRI CONTRIBUTED HEAVILY TO THE MONGE CAMPAIGN, RESOLUTIONS FOR INVESTIGATION OF BOTH PLN AND UNIDAD CAMPAIGN FINANCING WERE INTRODUCED IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY. PRESIDENT-ELECT CARAZO APPEALED PUBLICLY FOR A HALT TO WHAT HE CALLED AN UNNEEDED CONTINUATION OF CAMPAIGN-RELATED ACTIVITIES. OPPOSITION LEGISLATIVE LEADERS OPINE THAT PLN WILL PRESS HARD ON ALLEGED FOREIGN FINANCING OF THE OPPOSITION DURING THE REMAINING LEGISLATIVE PERIOD IN ORDER TO COUNTER THE CHARGES AGAINST PLN FROM MEXICO.

5. PLN POST-MORTEM. PLN LEADERS ARE STILL ANALYZING THEIR PARTY'S DEFEAT. MOST CITE THE "CONTINUISMO" ISSUE PLUS THE IMAGE OF THEIR CANDIDATE AS THE PRIME FACTORS IN THEIR LOSS. PLN LEADERS ALSO GIVE

GRUDGING CREDIT TO RODRIGO CARAZO FOR WAGING AN INTELLIGENT AND EFFECTIVE CAMPAIGN, AND FOR EXERTING STRONG VISIBLE LEADERSHIP (IN CONTRAST TO THEIR CANDIDATE). A FEW PLN LEADERS HAVE NOTED PUBLICLY THAT THE KNOWN DIFFERENCES BETWEEN ODUBER AND FIGUERES DID NOT HELP THEIR CAUSE. VERY FEW WILL ACKNOWLEDGE "CORRUPTION" AS A MAJOR REASON FOR THEIR DEFEAT. ALL BEMOAN THAT A STRONG SOCIO-ECONOMIC RECORD BY AN INCUMBENT GOVERNMENT IS NOT REWARDED BY SUPPORT AT THE POLLS FOR THE PARTY IN POWER.

6. CONSTITUTIONAL CONVENTION. IN HIS FEB 16 ADDRESS TO THE NATION, PRESIDENT ODUBER ANNOUNCED THAT THE MOMENT WAS NOT PROPITIOUS FOR AN EFFORT TO CALL FOR ELECTIONS FOR CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY. (TWO-THIRDS OF THE ASSEMBLY WOULD HAVE TO APPROVE THIS MEASURE BEFORE THE CURRENT CONGRESS ADJOURNS IN LATE APRIL.) PRESIDENT-ELECT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CARAZO HAD ANNOUNCED HIS OPPOSITION TO THIS MEASURE, AS HAD EX-PRESIDENT FIGUERES. LUIS ALBERTO MONGE WAS ALSO LUKE WARM ON THE PROJECT, WHICH PROBABLY WOULD HAVE PERMITTED EX-PRESIDENTS TO BE RE-ELECTED. MOST POLITICAL OBSERVERS JUDGED ODUBER'S ANNOUNCEMENT TO BE A POLITICAL DEFEAT FOR THE LAME DUCK PRESIDENT.

7. TRANSITION. DESPITE THE PUBLIC POLITICAL BICKERING, A SMOOTH TRANSITION PROCESS HAS ALREADY BEGUN; KEY CARAZO ADVISORS ALREADY HAVE BEGUN TO MEET WITH THEIR COUNTERPARTS IN THE ODUBER GOVERNMENT. AS IN COSTA RICAN CUSTOM, PRESIDENT ODUBER, AFTER THE SUPREME ELECTORAL TRIBUNAL OFFICIALLY DECLARED CARAZO THE VICTOR ON FEB 22, HAS INFORMED THE PRESIDENT-ELECT THAT HIS GOVERNMENT STANDS READY TO COOPERATE FULLY IN THE PASSING OF POWER TO THE CARAZO ADMINISTRATION. NO ONE HERE CONCEIVES THAT THIS PROCESS WILL BE ANYTHING BUT ORDERLY AND PEACEFUL.
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